New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

Volume VIII, Number 21 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of December 8, 1947

1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1946 Vol.

Stage Play	Page
Androcles and the Lion	217
*Annie Get Your Gun	382
Another Part of the Forest	247
Beggar's Holiday	204
*Born Yesterday	466
*Burlesque	208
*Call Me Mister	403
Christopher Blake	233
Cyrano de Bergerac	321
Fatal Weakness (The)	251
*Happy Birthday	280
Henry VIII	271
Iceman Cometh (The)	315
Joan of Lorraine	255
John Gabriel Borkman	263
Lady Windermere's Fan	307
Lovely Me	211
Made In Heaven	292
O Mistress Mine	474
Park Avenue	275
Playboy of the Western World (The)	287
Pound on Demand	217
Present Laughter	283
Show Boat	496
Temper the Wind	197
Toplitzky of Notre Dame	201
What Every Woman Knows	268
Wonderful Journey	214
Years Ago	229

1945 Vol.

Carousel	226
Red Mill (The)	141
State of the Union	102

1944 Vol.

Anna Lucasta	143
*Harvey	95

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

1940 Vol.

Life With Father	457

Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of December 8, 1947

1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1947

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	Page
Alice in Wonderland	398
All My Sons	475
*Allegro	300
*Antony and Cleopatra	255
As You Like It	451
Barefoot Boy With Cheek	402
Bathsheba	415
Big Two (The)	494
*Brigadoon	427
*Caribbean Carnival	246
Chocolate Soldier (The)	431
*Command Decision	328
Craig's Wife	457
Dear Judas	315
*Druid Circle (The)	288
Duet for Two Hands	312
Eagle Has Two Heads (The)	421
Eastward in Eden	261
*Finian's Rainbow	486
*First Mrs. Fraser (The)	267
*For Love or Money	271
Hamlet	447
Heads or Tails	377
*Heiress (The)	335
*High Button Shoes	304
How I Wonder	332
I Gotta Get Out	343
Importance of Being Earnest (The)	439
*Inspector Calls (An)	291
It Takes Two	469
*John Loves Mary	465
King Lear	453
Laura	353
Little A	483
Louisiana Lady	362
Love for Love	367
Love Goes to Press	497
Magic Touch (The)	348
*Man and Superman	308
*Medea	295
Medium (The)	379
Merchant of Venice (The)	450
Message for Margaret	393
Miracle in the Mountains	387
*Music In My Heart	324
Open House	359
Our Lan'	339
Parlor Story	436
Portrait in Black	371
Story of Mary Surratt (The)	461
*Streetcar Named Desire (A)	249
Street Scene	490
Sweethearts	479
Telephone (The)	379
Tenting Tonight	406
This Time Tomorrow	274
Trial Honeymoon	278
Under the Counter	320
Volpone	448
*Winslow Boy (The)	283
Whole World Over (The)	411
Yellow Jack	443
*Young Man's Fancy (A)	383
Critics' Circle Award	392
Pulitzer Award	376

Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of December 8, 1947

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Caribbean Carnival"

"A Streetcar Named Desire"

Theatre Critics Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN — NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Caribbean Carnival"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 6, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Calypso Show

A NOISY, energetic and frequently exciting Negro revue has opened at the International Theater. "Caribbean Carnival" makes much of the fact that it incorporates calypso numbers in its oddly assorted scenes. The improvizations from Trinidad highlight the vocal portions of this Adolph Thenstead production, with Josephine Premice and Duke of Iron doing the major singing. But it is the dancing, to little more than a percussive accompaniment, which is the chief distinction of the show. Claude Marchant and his group are something to see and so is Pearl Primus in a ritualistic bit of choreography.

* * *

Marchant is an extraordinarily assured artist. In "Enlorro" and "Canto de las Palmas" he creates a pattern of movement on the stage which makes his performance something more than a spot in a disorganized melange of night club turns. Avoiding the more obvious aspects of primitive dance designs, he achieves a clarity and subtlety of expression which is generally missing in "Carribean Carnival." Miss Primus is more theatrically sensational in her appearance. Unfortunately her "Rookombay," for all of its effectiveness, grows monotonous, as she and her assistants stomp through an age-old salute to the procreative instinct.

The songs which have prompted the sponsors of the show to call it "the first calypso musical ever presented" are not unfamiliar. Sometimes they are captivating; frequently merely raffish. Miss Premice has a whole bundle of them to herself in one scene and makes the most of them. Duke of Iron is considerably better than she in a few wisely selected numbers. Scattered at random through the exhibit, as they are, they do little to make the first calypso musical a theatrical event of much consequence. Thenstead might have been better advised to offer "Caribbean Carnival" as a dance recital.

* * *

Whatever else it may lack, the show does not want exuberance. The Negro performers, from principals to members of the chorus, are almost frenetic in their efforts to lend color and excitement to the proceedings. The Smith Kids, Sam Manning and Pamela Ward are among those who take over between the occasional integrated stage designs. Manning and Thenstead are responsible for the lyrics and music which you may not have already heard in calypso recordings or in the cabarets. They should not demand much credit for them.

'CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL.'

CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL, a "Calypso musical." Lyrics and music by Samuel L. Manning and Adolph Thenstead. Direction by Mr. Manning and Col. John J. Hirshman. Choreography by Pearl Primus and Claude Marchant. Costumes by Lou Eisele. Orchestra conducted by Ken Macomber. Presented by Mr. Thenstead. At the International Theatre.

Company: Pearl Primus, Josephine Premice, Claude Marchant, Duke of Iron, Sam Manning, the Smith Kids, Pamela Ward, Trio Cubana, Peggy Watson, Alex Young, Curtis James, Paddy Fredericks, Fred Thomas, Eloise Hill, Dorothy Graham and Charles Queenan.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 6, 1947

Pearl Primus and Claude Marchant in a Calypso Musical Entitled 'Caribbean Carnival'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

If talent always received its just reward, the "Caribbean Carnival," which was put on at the International last evening, would turn out to be a rousing show. For some of the dancing talent is remarkably accomplished and original, and several of the numbers first rate. Billed as "the first Calypso musical ever presented" it has rounded up some interesting dancers, singers and musicians from the trade wind islands, with a healthy infiltration from Harlem, where the folks know show business.

* * *

The most distinguished dancers are Pearl Primus and Claude Marchant. Miss Primus has filled most of the second act with a voodoo ballet that is infinitely superior to the tawdry orgies Broadway usually stages. Composed for many dancers in an exciting pattern of rhythm and spinning motion, it introduces something genuine into an old show-shop topic. Mr. Marchant is also a wonderfully winning dancer. In a group of Caribbean dances he and his troupe conclude the first half of this carnival with some exultant festivities. Miss Primus and Mr. Marchant deserve an evening of triumphant showmanship. They should not be wasted on this feeble assembly of odds and ends.

* * *

For "Caribbean Carnival" cannot make up its mind whether it is a musical show or a dance recital. The Iron Duke is present—combining native philosophy with the rhyme scheme of Ogden Nash. The Iron Duke's ballads are too intricately worded for a large theatre; the humor evaporates in so capacious an auditorium. Josephine Premice, who has a dazzling style, sings provincial songs with gusto. The Smith Kids, brother and sister, sing a number of island cafe tunes, including the familiar "peas and rice" morality tale. And the "Trio Cubana" are working for the Yankee dollar with a pair of lively guitars. There is also one saucy performer, impossible to identify in the program, who contributes a vivid and humorous dance of the washerwoman.

* * *

Calypso is a monotonous rhythm for an entire evening. That is one basic defect in "Caribbean Carnival." But apart from that the material has not been organized into the form of a professional show. Since some of the dancers are unusually gifted, since all of them are interesting and since some of the material is refreshing and original, the rudderless production is a pity. Miss Primus and Mr. Marchant deserve a wide acquaintance.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 6, 1947

'Caribbean Carnival' Is Nerve Shattering

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Caribbean Carnival" takes a few exciting high points and pulls them down to an all over average of an evening of incredible monotony.

The new musical is almost entirely Calypso, which is one of its basic faults. The virtues of this type of song are spontaneity and a strictly repetitive rhythm. When it is formalized it is meaningless. A whole evening of it is more than anyone should be asked to sit through.

The dancing that goes with it suffers from much the same trouble. While it is primitive and original it is exciting. The minute it smacks of studied choreography it becomes false and ugly.

The revue is threaded on a vague idea of a photographer trying to worm her way into a voodoo meeting in Trinidad. The first half of the show is a series of specialties leading up to the ceremony which is most of the second act.

Dance Is Exhausting.

Pearl Primus is featured and takes over as a native priestess in the long number which she designed. It has not much of interest or novelty to offer aside from her own frantic intensity. Last night she seemed worn out by her efforts before she reached the climax of her dance.

The most arresting numbers of the show are the dances of Claude Marchant. He has a wild passionate fluidity in his movements, and is at his ecstatic best in a conga performed to drums.

Josephine Premice can be a captivating if theatrical songstress, and moves about the stage with exquisite grace as she chants.

Rhythms Rip Nerves.

The Duke of Iron is also featured in the show and offers his specialized brand of island songs. He adds nothing visually to his musical performance, and in this show contents himself with singing numbers that are either over familiar or undistinguished.

The original music for the revue all sounds pretty much alike, and the orchestrations are transparent.

An evening's constant drumming of Calypso rhythms can be one of the most nerve wracking of theatrical experiences, and in this case, it is.

The Sun

DECEMBER 6, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Dull Exercises in Trinidad.

The drama reporters were summoned, and duly reported, for last night's exercises in Columbus Circle, the revue called "Caribbean Carnival" being submitted at the International. Speaking as the somewhat fretful occupant of seats C 1 and 3, I didn't have a festive evening. The all-Calypso production is shapeless and mirthless; there is a great sameness and monotony to it all.

"Caribbean Carnival," brought in by Adolph Thenstead, provides two hours of color and rhythm, chants and gyrations, tom-tom beating and jungle wailing, spasms of dance, snatches of song, feeble efforts at comedy, and no showmanship at all.

It's a revue tossed together haphazardly, and the playbill frequently loses track of the proceedings, but in the course of the evening you're given the specialties of the Claude Marchant group, the contributions of the Duke of Iron, Pearl Primus's Rookombay (Voodoo Night), Eloise Hill's firefly dance, and general hullabaloo of the marketplace. It's a show with sound, fury and frenzy, but it's still curiously lifeless.

Pearl Primus, once of "Show Boat" and of many concert appearances, dances with great vigor. The tall, lithe Claude Marchant is an exciting dancer, with something of the style of Jack Cole. Josephine Premice does well with the vocal numbers, and Sam Manning, who had a hand in writing the show, is a tropical comedian with a droll delivery, but with no material. The Smith Kids are around, and so are Pamela Ward and the Trio Cubana.

My own explorations of Trinidad have been confined to a pleasant hour or so at the bar of Queen Park Hotel and to a diligent tour of the town of Port of Spain, and the island then seemed a far gayer place than it did last night at the International.

"Caribbean Carnival" is noisy, colorful, congested, frenzied—and very dull.

Journal-American

DECEMBER 6, 1947

First Calypso Musical Produced Fails to Click

By ROBERT GARLAND

As long as they keep the poor white trash out of "Caribbean Carnival" up at the International, "the first calypso musical ever presented" gives promise of developing into a lively, if repetitious, black-and-tan song-and-dance show. But—

Well, when Pamela Ward comes oh-so-Nordically on-stage pretending to be a lady journalist assigned to cover Trinidad, something goes wrong with Adolph Thenstead's West Indian powwow. It's a serious something from which is never quite recovers.

It sickens, then, and dies from trying to be funny. The humor, injected in honor of the gentlewoman of the press, is simply killing. For instance! "What Napoleon?" the White Lady asks. "Napoleon Bones-Apart" a Black Gentleman replies . . .

He's one, Sergeant Squashie!

• • •

Calypso Program

In spite of which the first—and last?—calypso musical ever presented proceeds to carry out its program. Its program consists of calypso songs, calypso dances and just plain calypso. Of the three, the dances are more quiet than the others.

Claude Marchant's Group indulges in "Enilore," which has to do with voodoo, and "Canto de las Palmas," which, obviously has to do with palm trees. These feature Mr. Marchant, the group's calypso choreographer, and Billie Allen. They're good and jokeless.

After which the Black Gentleman, who's Sam Manning, and the White Lady who's Pamela Ward, return in "Bribe for an Officer." More niftles come with them. But nothing to hold a candle to the brilliance of the one about the calypso Napoleon . . .

Good old Napoleon Bones-Apart!

• • •

Voodoo Variation

The second stanza gets going with "Rookombay," a voodoo variation in which Pearl Primus, the featured featured entertainer, does everything but hang by her heels and sing the praises of Katherine Dunham. There's calypso music by Duke of Iron.

The Duke, who's name is Cecil Anderson, remains for "America, The Great," "Marabella" and "Pretty," with which calypso record buyers are familiar. Assisting are Josephine Premice, Peggy Watson and Eddie Talliferro. Then Miss Primus again, as three Calypso Women.

It's all most certainly calypso. And, in my dictionary, "calypso" is a sea nymph, a terrestial orchid or a flexible improvation. Where "Caribbean Carnival's" concerned, you pays your money and you takes your choice. Or you stands at home quietly in bed . . .

I'm for the last named!

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 6, 1947

Tropical Songs, Dances In 'Caribbean Carnival'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

They say it was the late George Washington Hill's theory of advertising that, if a phrase is repeated often enough to become damnably annoying, it is effective. He was, in short, a calypso artist, a huckster from the Caribbees. At the International Theatre last evening a calypso revue titled "Caribbean Carnival" was effective enough to drive me out into Columbus Circle with a throbbing head, a feeling of unrest and a resolve not to look at anybody's big toes, including mine, for a long long time.

This barefoot barn dance, right from the West Indies with a stopover in Greenwich Village, held in thrall a good part of the audience. They were, I suppose, experts, appreciative of the finer things. But the beat beat beat of the tom-toms as the jungle shadow fell made me feel like the Emperor Jones: I wanted to get out of there. Nor did I think that an entire evening of self-inflicted spinal adjustments was a satisfactory substitute for dancing.

Exciting—for a While.

There is an irresistible physical excitement in the throb and chatter of those tropical drums—for about ten minutes. After that one may become numb. Ravel's "Bolero" is a stirring circus piece for an orchestra but if it were played over and over for a couple of hours it would become a bore—except to people who are just nuts about Ravel's "Bolero."

The entertainers in "Caribbean Carnival" include Pearl Primus, a well-known dancer with an electrified torso; Josephine Premice, who has a great following among addicts of the calypso song, and a handsome and amiable fellow who calls himself the Duke of Iron, who also sings calypso. There is a fairly large and colorfully costumed chorus, and the principal male dancer seems to be Claude Marchant, who is lanky, limber and given to leaps.

To this unappreciative ear, a calypso song is about as interesting as a stuck phonograph needle. It goes on and on and after it is all over, which apparently is whenever the singer gets tired of the thing, I don't know any more than I did to begin with.

Which, as you can plainly see, is nothing whatever. Just don't pay any attention to me and go see "Caribbean Carnival" if you want to. Everybody in it is good-natured and eager to please.

New York Post

DECEMBER 6, 1947

Calypso Musical Show

— By Richard Watts Jr. —

Just to demonstrate the versatility of the theatre, there arrived last night at the International a show billed as the first calypso revue ever presented. It is called "Caribbean Carnival," and it turned out to be a Negro dancing show, with an emphasis on West Indian atmosphere, but not enough calypso numbers. It is neither well-organized nor skillfully produced, and it refused absolutely to adhere to its printed program. In fact, it seems to have been thrown on the stage without much guidance of any kind, and some vague shred of plot, something about a blonde girl photographer in Trinidad, appears to have got entangled in it when no one was looking. But it has its points.

Point one is Josephine Premice (not to be confused with Pearl Primus), a fine, tall, delightful girl, with an air about her, who sings amusingly, engagingly and with distinction. Point two is Pearl Primus (not to be confused with Josephine Premice), a rather grim dancer, but an impressive one. Point three is Claude Marchant, a brilliant, dynamic dancer, who is unashamedly happy at his work and has every reason to be. Point four is the Duke of Iron, a mild gentleman for so stern a title, who sings one particularly good, if well-known, calypso number. Points five and six are two good-looking girl dancers with Claude Marchant. The cast's gayety of spirit gives "Caribbean Carnival" a curiously disarming air.

Daily Mirror

DECEMBER 6, 1947

Calypso Musical Has Premiere

By ROBERT COLEMAN

A Calypso king, as we understand it, is a tropical poet laureate who reduces topical ideas to bad verse. A little Calypso goes a long way with us and there's far too much of it in "Caribbean Carnival," "the first Calypso musical ever produced," which Adolph Thenstead presented at the International Theatre last evening.

The new arrival's Calypso star is a stringbean of a fellow billed as Duke of Iron. He warbled his Calypsos to the accompaniment of a mammoth ukelele, or it could be a midget guitar. Don't ask us what he warbled about. We didn't understand a lot of it and we don't remember the rest of it.

For sophisticated New York tastes, vivacious Josephine Premice renders Calypsos that resemble the songs that radio bans and record collectors buy under the counter. Miss Premice has changed her style since last we heard her. She's veering to the Gertrude Lawrence cutie-pie method now.

We like her better when she sticks to the Josephine Premice method, which is saucy in an "I don't care", dead-pan, rhythmically evocative way. But no matter how Miss Premice sings her songs, she knows the value of economy of means. She never uses a superfluous motion and gives meaning to every little movement. She's an artist.

The Claude Marchant Company is another "Carribean Carnival" asset. Marchant's group dances in the Kathryn Dunham manner, which embellishes primitive motion with ballet and modern dance figures.

Top billing is given Pearl Primus, who has established a large, enthusiastic following of local cultists. Her artistry still escapes us. She is a butterball of energy, who appears to combine the best features of a college cheer leader and a Mexican jumping bean.

Miss Primus completely dominates the second half of the evening. Her big number is a tame recreation of a voodoo night called "Rookombay." Just why the bay is added puzzles this pig Latin patoistician.

Others in the cast are Sam Manning, the Smith Kids, the Cuban Trio and Pamela Ward. Miss Ward runs about flashing a minicamera and posing as a newsphotographer. Manning is credited on the program as co-author of the show with producer Thenstead. Author Manning has played some dirty tricks on actor Manning.

"Caribbean Carnival" serves mainly to remind us how wonderful those Dunham revues were. Forget that school for a while, Kathryn, and bring the theatre another tropical heatwave.

PM EXCLUSIVE

DECEMBER 8, 1947

Kronenberger

Far Too Many Dances, Far Too Many Ditties

An immense amount of energy and a respectable amount of performing talent have been wasted in *Caribbean Carnival*. It's hard to see how anybody could have supposed they wouldn't be—could have looked for good results from anything so very uneven in quality, so entirely devoid of variety, so hopelessly lacking in showmanship. As a matter of fact, the show was doomed by its program-making alone. Except for a few startlingly awful humorous bits, *Caribbean Carnival* is made up of absolutely nothing but strenuous tropical dancing and routine Calypso tunes. Even had every dance been exciting, and every ditty gay, the effect must have been that of watching the same floor show six times over. And with most of the doings as mediocre as they were monotonous, besides being noisier than Niagara Falls, *Caribbean Carnival* was pretty tough to sit through.

• • •

No doubt it was just as tough to act in—particularly for performers with something to offer. In a properly balanced musical, some of Claude Marchant's dancing and some of Josephine Premice's singing would seem just right; and even in so unbalanced a one, they manage to seem effective. Pearl Primus, too—though what I fear impresses me most is her energy—hasn't the right chance to seem striking among so much else that seems similar. Of the artistic merits of the dances in *Caribbean Carnival*, my colleagues Miss Herridge and Mr. Hague can speak far better than I; for myself, I would only say that the dances seem, in general, a poor blend of the folkish and the factitious, and so neither nature nor art. But as entertainment—obviously so many dances of one kind and of this kind couldn't be entertaining. Take just the monotony that is an *integral* part of the music: after a couple of hours, it's bound to seem an insufferable part of the show.

Without being very erudite about Calypso, I would venture to say that as entertainment it, too, has limited charms; and that after a while, it kept providing a change from the dances in *Caribbean Carnival* without in any way providing an improvement. Moreover, there is better Calypso than the current show boasts. This, indeed, can hardly be called a show on any basis indicative of showmanship. It is sloppy and soggy and anywhich-way in presentation, and on opening night even the program was constantly jumping the track.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER.

"A Streetcar Named Desire"

New York Post

DECEMBER 4, 1947

'Streetcar Named Desire' Is Striking Drama

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Tennessee Williams' new play is a feverish, squalid, tumultuous, painful, steadily arresting and oddly touching study of feminine decay along the lower Mississippi. Brilliantly staged by Elia Kazan and ably acted by Jessica Tandy and some other good players, "A Streetcar Named Desire" last night added notably to the color and excitement of the theatrical season, demonstrated once more the skill of its director and actors, and indicated again that Mr. Williams is an oncoming playwright of power, imagination and almost desperately morbid turn of mind and emotion.

In his latest work to reach Broadway, the dramatist is telling the story of a doomed Southern girl who seems startlingly like what the foolish old mother of his previous drama, "The Glass Menagerie," might well have been at a similar age. Hers, to put it mildly, is not a pleasant life story. Essentially a romantic and dreamy young woman, it is her fate to represent in her frail spirit the decline and fall of a long line of decadent Southern aristocrats, and, for all her sentimental imagination, she ends as a simpering, witless prostitute.

Two Traits

Two characteristic traits of Mr. Williams' morbid imagination are distinguishable in his new play. I should say that one was admirable and the other less praiseworthy. Despite the blackness of fate which he depicts, there is a frequent quality of lyric originality in his pessimism that gives it an inescapable vitality. Things may look depressing to him, but there is always the rich tumult of life to make up for it. On the other hand, his doomed heroines are so helplessly enmeshed in their fate they cannot put up a properly dramatic battle against it.

There is something a little embarrassing about watching the torment of as helpless a victim of a playwright's brooding imagination as the heroine of "A Streetcar Named Desire," particularly when her downfall is studied with almost loving detail. The result is that the play has a painful, rather pitiful quality about it. Yet its characters are so knowingly and understandably presented, the vividness of its life is so compelling, and the theatrical skill of its portrait of spiritual and moral decay so impressive that it never ceases to be effective and powerful.

Jessica Tandy

In the long and difficult central role, Jessica Tandy, invariably an interesting actress, is always deeply moving, even though she starts with a considerable handicap. For the truth is that she doesn't manage to suggest a chattering, cocquettish girl from the deep South to any one's satisfaction. It is all the more a tribute to her, therefore, that the honesty and sensitivity of her playing are great enough to make the defect in type casting unimportant.

I have hitherto not shared the enthusiasm of most reviewers for Marion Brando, but his portrayal of the heroine's sullen, violent nemesis is an excellent piece of work. Even finer, though, is Karl Malden, one of the ablest young actors extant, as the girl's sentimental and disillusioned admirer. There is likewise a good performance by Kim Hunter as the less complex sister of the lost neurotic. Everything about the production of "A Streetcar Named Desire" has gone well, including the setting, lighting and costumes, and the result is one of the events of the season.

'A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE.'

Play by Tennessee Williams; staged by Elia Kazan; scenery and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; presented by Irene M. Selznick at the Ethel Barrymore Theater Wednesday evening, December 3, 1947. The cast

Negro Woman ..... Gee Gee James
Eunice Hubbel ..... Peg Hillias
Stanley Kowalski ..... Marlon Brando
Harold Mitchell (Mitch) ..... Karl Malden
Stella Kowalski ..... Kim Hunter
Steve Hubbel ..... Rudy Bond
Blanche Du Bois ..... Jessica Tandy
Pablo Gonzales ..... Nick Dennis
A Young Collector ..... Vito Christi
Mexican Woman ..... Edna Thomas
A Strange Woman ..... Ann Dere
A Strange Man ..... Richard Garrick

SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes places in the spring, summer and early fall in New Orleans.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 4, 1947

'Streetcar Named Desire' Sets Season's High in Acting, Writing

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Tennessee Williams, a young playwright who is not ashamed of being a poet, has given us a superb drama in "A Streetcar Named Desire." Last evening, under the sentient direction of Elia Kazan, it was given a brilliant performance at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. The company, headed by Jessica Tandy, Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter and Karl Malden, is the answer to a playgoer's prayer.

Williams came upon the theatrical scene with "The Glass Menagerie," a delicate, haunting and tender dramatic fragment which marked him as a writer to be reckoned with. This promise of more to come, and better to come, has been fulfilled in his new work. "Menagerie" was memorably performed by the late Laurette Taylor, Eddie Dowling, Julie Haydon and Anthony Ross; "A Streetcar Named Desire" comes warmly to life in the playing—and it is certain now that Williams writes actable dramas.

"The Glass Menagerie" was, as I have said, a fragment, a cameo. The new play is full-scale—throbbingly alive, compassionate, heart-wrenchingly human. It has the tragic overtones of grand opera, and is, indeed, the story of a New Orleans Camille—a wistful little trollop who shuns the reality of what she is and takes gallant and desperate refuge in a magical life she has invented for herself.

Other End of the Line.

In New Orleans there are, Mr. Williams has pointed out, two streetcars, one named Desire, the other Cemetery, and this is a theme of his play. To Blanche du Bois, a schoolteacher in her thirties, death is one thing and the other end of the line is not just life, but desire.

When one meets her she has taken the car named Desire to visit the sleazy but happy "quarter" home of her sister, who is married to a stalwart Polish-American whose enthusiasms run to bowling, beer, poker and whisky. He is a realist, is Stanley Kowalski—and Blanche is in flight from reality.

She has come, she tells her sister, because she has not been well. She has taken leave of absence from her teaching job back in their home in Mississippi. Once the girls had a fine house there, but it has slipped from Blanche's hands—just how is never made clear, for Blanche is not one for facts.

This dream world of hers is beautiful—but terrifying, as one comes to see the person Blanche really is. She is the Hatrack of her Mississippi town; a generous, loving accomodator of any yearning stranger who has been driven out. But in her own mind she is a lady of purest ray serene, and her trunk of shoddy carnival raiment and rhinstone tiaras is the finest of the fine. She is a pitiful figure and her story is told with pity and acted glorious by Miss Tandy; and there is heartbreak in the theatre when, broken but ever so gallant, she is led away to a place where dreamers may dream out their lives.

Mr. Williams has set his tale against a colorful, noisy, lustily humorous background—the generous and earthy life of a New Orleans tenement. From across the street there comes into the Kowalskis' two small rooms the music of a honky-tonk. Into the rooms, too, come the Kowalskis' friends, including a gentle man who finds in Blanche the girl of girls—until he sees her in the bright light of actuality.

Mr. Brando is magnificent as the forthright husband, in his simple rages, his simple affections and his blunt humor. Admirable is Miss Hunter as Blanche's easygoing sister, and Mr. Malden is splendid as the shy admirer. Mr. Williams has skillfully combined the touch of a poet with the practicality of a dramatic craftsman, and Jo Mielziner has housed "A Streetcar Named Desire" in an extraordinarily effective setting. The production marks the managerial debut here of Irene Selznick, who had the grace and wisdom to turn it over to Mr. Kazan to bring it into being.

The Sun

DECEMBER 4, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

New Hit Named 'Desire.'

Tennessee Williams has written a gaudy, violent and fascinating study of the disintegration of a Southern belle in "A Streetcar Named Desire," put on last evening at the Barrymore. It is played with uncommon skill and it has been carefully and expertly staged by Elia Kazan.

Williams is again writing of a locale that he knows. He has put some earthy characters, jolting humor and pungent writing—and along with writing that is occasionally high-flown—into his absorbing story of crumbled grandeur in the delta country. His title is taken from the name of a streetcar that careened unconcernedly through the New Orleans quarter in which he lived.

This new play by the author of "The Glass Menagerie" presents a tale of two sisters, well born, whose plantation was lost in debt. The younger sister, Stella, has achieved a certain security in marriage to a simple, hard-working, brute of a boy, an ex-G. I. of Polish parentage, and she loves him. The other and older girl, Blanche, neurotic and desperate, comes a-calling.

Her own marriage ended in a revolting tragedy. She lost her job as school teacher and was driven out of the town of Laurel after having become the town trollop. She takes refuge in Stella's cramped, dingy, curtained-off quarters as the play begins and it depicts her downhill course and her last, pitiful efforts to save something out of the wreck of her life.

"A Streetcar Named Desire" is not a play for the squeamish. It is often coarse and harrowing and it is frequently somewhat jerky in its blacked-out sequences, but it is a playwriting job of enormous gusto and vitality and poignance and Irene M. Selznick has given it the advantages of Kazan's extraordinarily knowing direction, Lucinda Ballard's costumes and Jo Mielziner's scenery. Mielziner's fine setting reveals the interior of the squalid flat in which the Kowalskis have their brawling and blissful moments, and the device of a scrim curtain provides frequent glimpses of the street outside.

There is some superb acting upon the Barrymore's stage. There is quite a good deal of Amanda, out of "The Glass Menagerie," in the character of Blanche, the faded, shattered daughter of the South, who is played by Jessica Tandy. It's one of the longest roles ever assigned to an actress and Miss Tandy comes through with a compelling performance. Her final crack-up is beautifully done.

Marlon Brando turns in his finest work to date in his characterization of the slow-witted, virile, uncomprehending young husband. Kim Hunter, making her first New York appearance, is human and direct, a first-rate young actress, and she makes Stella a genuine person. Karl Malden is tremendously effective as the gawky, naive suitor who is agonized by the revelation of Blanche's past. Ann Dere and Richard Garrick are silent and menacing as the grim couple from the asylum who come at the younger sister's bidding to take Blanche away.

"A Streetcar Named Desire" is an intense play, packed with genuine theater. It is a full evening's worth, and it is sometimes as much of a show as it is a play. It will be at the Barrymore when the sidewalks of 47th street are sizzling under next summer's heat.

PM

DECEMBER 5, 1947

Kronenberger

A Sharp Southern Drama By Tennessee Williams

A Streetcar Named Desire is by all odds the most creative new play of the season—the one that reveals the most talent, the one that attempts the most truth. It carries us into the only part of the theater that really counts — not the most obviously successful part, but the part where, though people frequently blunder they seldom compromise; where imagination is seated higher than photography; and where the playwright seems to have a certain genuine interest in pleasing himself.

• • •

That is the most important thing about *A Streetcar Named Desire;* a more important thing, it seems to me, than that *A Streetcar* is by no means always a good play. It falls down in places; it goes wrong in places. But what is right about it is also, in today's theater, rare. There is something really investigative, something often impassioned, about Mr. Williams' feeling for his material. There is something—in the play's best scenes—that reveals deeper intimations, as well as sharper talent, than most of Mr. Williams' fellow-playwrights can boast. And there is a willingness to be adventurous in the pursuit of truth.

• • •

The problem of truth isn't made any simpler because Mr. Williams' heroine happens to be the most demoniacally driven kind of liar—the one who lies to the world because she must lie to herself. His Blanche Du Bois, whose gradual disintegration is the subject of his drama, is Southern-genteel and empty of purse; highly sexed and husbandless; full of fine-lady airs, and the town's most notorious tramp. When she comes to New Orleans to visit her sister and brother-in-law in their shabby quarters, she drags her whole paste-diamond dream world—her airs and pretenses, her nymphomania posing as straitlacedness—with her. But her brother-in-law, a warmhearted but violeht and no-nonsense roughneck, sees through her at once and proves her nemesis. When he finds her trying to turn his wife against him, and then trying to nab his best friend in marriage, the brother-in-law gets the goods on Blanche and brutally shows her up. She loses her guy; while her sister is in the hospital, her brother-in-law takes her to bed; and when she blabs, her brother-in-law argues that she is crazy, and has her committed to an asylum where she would all too soon be due in any case.

• • •

In Blanche, Mr. Williams hasn't quite contrived a real, progressive study in disintegration; except toward the end, his method is too static, with Blanche often a kind of fascinating exhibit—but an exhibit none the less. What both she and the play need is less repetition and more variety; there were times, toward the middle of the play, when I found myself fairly bored. In the last and best third, however, there is a genuine release of emotional excitement; and the conflict between Blanche and her brother-in-law—which may not be Mr. Williams' theme, but is certainly his story—is always good theater, and quite often good drama. And just because it doesn't much induce us to take sides, it comes to move us, in the end, as part of the malignity and messiness of life itsef. It brings a certain dry pity, along with a certain new power, into Mr. Williams' work; *A Streetcar* is an enormous advance over that minor-key and too wet-eyed work, *The Glass Menagerie.*

• • •

It has had, moreover, a very good production. Mr. Kazan has capitalized on all its vividness and innate sense of theater without ever letting it topple over into mere theatricalism. As Blanche, Jessica Tandy begins by seeming miscast—she doesn't, for one thing, look the way you think Blanche should—but ends up little short of triumphantly; hers is a performance that should not be underrated. No one is likely to underrate Marlon Brando's brilliant performance of the brother-in-law, the more astonishing for being like nothing else he has ever played. There are good jobs, too, by Karl Malden and Kim Hunter; and the whole thing looks right, thanks to Jo Mielziner's set and Lucinda Ballard's costumes.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 4, 1947

'Streetcar' a Fine Play of Clashing Emotions

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"A Streetcar Named Desire" is a terrific adventure in theater. Tennessee Williams models out of the rawest materials and his finished art is harsh realism.

It is lost souls that preoccupy him, the people whose sensitivity condemns them to total disappointment. The rude bluffness of living which destroys them is the same harshness that hurts or toughens everybody.

Blanche Du Bois is the sort of woman whose imagination would have let her make a great deal of a little. In destitution she creates a facade of pathetic glory out of baths and scents, and shabby finery and paste jewelry.

She springs from the same source as the Mother in "The Glass Menagerie," but Mr. Williams has written a much stronger, surer play about her.

After her marriage's sordid ending she has struggled to keep up the remnants of an ancestral Southern estate. Her existence meant constant association with old age and death. Her school teaching job is gone and she makes an ostensible visit to her married sister.

Stella, philosophical and earthy, is entirely happy in a simple lusty existence with Stanley, a Polish mechanic, whom Blanche considers an ape. Their life is elemental with violent outbreaks and ecstatic reconciliations.

The play is basically an enthralling account of the conflict between Blanche and Stanley. They have no sympathy or understanding and a deep contempt for each other. The only rare agreement by either of them is for the sake of Stella.

The one thing they know in common is physical desire. Stanley is an honest animal who needs no motivation for anything he does other than he wants to do it at that particular moment.

Blanche, out of loneliness and desperation, rationalizes everything she does until she can assure herself of a motive that involves charity or nobility in an expression of her dainty exquisite self. Her life has become loose in the most degraded sense, but she clings to an elegance to which she insists her taste and sensitiveness entitle her.

The nervous rasp of their mutual irritation is depicted in terms of rare theatrical tension and excitement. There are scenes of violence and raw emotion that leave you pop-eyed and gasping. And there are quiet, gentle scenes that in their way are just as absorbing.

Where Laurette Taylor brought magnetic quickness to "Glass Menagerie," Elia Kazan has done the same here with his brilliant direction.

Jessica Tandy, in the monumental role of Blanche, infallibly projects the two essential planes of the character. One is the immediate unrelenting hopelessness of the woman, and the other her desperate falseness. She makes her pathos repellent rather than sympathetic, giving the play credibility and a tumultuous effect on the emotions.

As the story progresses one wishes that Blanche would only slip over into recognizable derangement, but the scarring truth is that she never quite does.

Marlon Brando plays the blunt and passionate Stanley with an astonishing authenticity. His stilted speech and swift rages are ingeniously spontaneous, while his deep-rooted simplicity is sustained every second.

Kim Hunter is mellow and philosophical as the devoted Stella who tries to synchronize two impossible loyalties, and Karl Malden is eloquently unrelaxed as the hesitant suitor who almost saves Blanche.

Journal American

DECEMBER 4, 1947

Williams' New Play Exciting Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

I'm not sure that, in "A Streetcar Named Desire," Tennessee Williams has written a well-constructed play. As a matter of dutiful reporting, I'm not sure that he has written a play at all. Nevertheless, I'm here to tell you that he has engendered an extraordinary exciting evening in theatre.

There were more encores—spontaneous encores—last night at the Ethel Barrymore than your dutiful reporter could remain to count. The curtain rose, fell, then rose again, until, in response to "Author! Author!" the Mississippian called Tennessee came on to take a beautifully bewildered bow.

It was an extraordinarily exciting evening, all right, with a brilliant congregation — half Broadway, half Hollywood—going to town for Irene Selznick as a theatrical producer, a petticoated Gilbert Miller to stand beside a Cheryl Crawford, a Jean Dalrymple or, say, a Viola Rubber.

And, as a producer, Louis Mayer's daughter has succeeded beyond her well-wishers' expectations. So assured is her producing, so proudly planned, so expertly executed, that Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" looks, sounds and actually is better than it would be without her ministrations.

* * *

Pursued by Furies

This time, as in "The Glass Menagerie," the Mississippian called Tennessee — Thomas Lanier Williams, was born in Columbus, Mississippi, in 1914—has turned to a frustrated Southern gentlewoman for his goddess from the machine. This time she is younger in years than Amanda Wingfield, but she is older in frustrations.

In "A Streetcar Named Desire," Blanche Du Bois, is more sinned against than usual. When a tiny tot, back on the old plantation, her boy friend acted kind of odd, and ran away with her odder sort of rival. From then on, the furies consistently pursued her. Finally, they chased her right out of the Du Bois' Southern city.

And into her sister Stella's shabby New Orleans apartment. There, the better balanced of the two is married to a toughly tender American whose name is Stanley Kowalski. What's more, she loves him. So everything is as it should be between Stella and her Stanley until Blanche arrives, riding on the streetcar named Desire.

Here's the everlasting triangle, with a good boy called Harold Mitchell to further complicate an already complicated situation. Mitch, as The Quarter calls him, falls in love with Blanche. But Blanche, who's been a bad girl back home, is punished, repunished and then led away when her past and present gang up against her.

* * *

Couldn't Be Better

Thanks to Irene Selznick's professional production—superb direction by Elia Kazan, collaborative backgrounds by Jo Mielziner, cooperative costumes by Lucinda Ballard, atmospheric music by Lehman Engel and a cast which, taken by and large, could not be bettered—this melodramatic mixture of muck and magnolias adds up to something special.

In a role that would test the talents of a Duse or a Bernhardt, a Cornell or an Anderson, Jessica Tandy deserves the bravos which were her's last evening. Because of Miss Tandy's many merits as Blanche Du Bois, you're all but willing to overlook a none-too-pleasant voice and a leaning toward monotony.

On the other hand, no fault is to be found with the Stanley Kowalski of Marlon Brando. Here, in "A Streetcar Named Desire," is our theatre's most memorable young actor at his most memorable. And the Harold Mitchell of Karl Malden and the Young Collector of Vito Christi are, in their respective ways, contributorily impressive.

As Stella Kowalski, Kim Hunter is their equal, as are the Eunice and Steve Hubbel of Peg Hillias and Rudy Bond . . . But "A Streetcar Named Desire" is an extraordinarily exciting whole made up of many a finely-fashioned part. And that's why Irene Selznick, Broadway's new producer, is the real star of Tennessee William's latest draught of Southern Discomfort.